Ethical Issues in Major World Religions: A Comparative Analysis in Contemporary Society

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Abstract

Ethical debates in contemporary society are increasingly influenced by rapid social change, technological progress, and global interconnectedness. These transformations raise important questions regarding how religious traditions interpret and respond to emerging moral challenges. Major world religions, which historically function as sources of ethical guidance, continue to engage with issues such as human rights, environmental sustainability, and bioethics in diverse yet interconnected ways. This study aims to conduct a comparative analysis of ethical issues addressed in the teachings of major world religions, namely Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism. The study employs a qualitative method using a content analysis approach by examining various religious texts and relevant academic literature. The findings reveal that despite theological differences among these religions, there are several similarities in the ethical principles and approaches used to address contemporary issues such as human rights, environmental concerns, and bioethics. These findings indicate that religious ethical values remain relevant in responding to various moral challenges in modern society. Therefore, this study highlights the importance of strengthening interreligious dialogue in fostering mutual understanding and seeking ethical solutions to global humanitarian issues.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of science, technology, and globalization has significantly transformed many aspects of contemporary human life (Makarova et al., 2019). These transformations influence not only economic and political structures but also social values, cultural practices, and ethical orientations within society. As societies become increasingly interconnected, individuals and communities encounter new moral dilemmas that were previously less visible or less complex. In this context, ethical considerations remain essential in guiding human behavior and maintaining social harmony amid rapid change (Kirby et al., 2022).

Modernity has also generated a range of complex ethical challenges. Issues such as human rights, social justice, gender equality, cultural and religious pluralism, and environmental sustainability have become central topics in contemporary public discourse. At the same time, advancements in information technology and

biotechnology have introduced new ethical questions related to data privacy, artificial intelligence, genetic engineering, and biomedical decision-making (Khotimah et al., 2024; Rheude et al., 2021). These developments often create moral dilemmas that require thoughtful reflection and responsible ethical frameworks. Consequently, ethical discussions today frequently involve interdisciplinary perspectives that integrate philosophical reasoning, social considerations, and spiritual values (Engkizar et al., 2025; Kobandaha et al., 2025; Makridakis, 2017; Yao, 2022).

Within this broader context, religion continues to play an important role as a source of moral guidance for many societies around the world. Major world religions including Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism have historically provided ethical teachings that shape individual conduct and collective values (Baroud et al., 2025; Jaafar et al., 2025; Okenova et al., 2025). Religious traditions generally offer moral frameworks that regulate relationships between humans and the divine, among human beings, and between humans and the natural environment. These ethical teachings are expressed through sacred texts, religious traditions, and interpretations developed by scholars and religious leaders across different historical periods.

However, the ethical teachings of religious traditions were often articulated in historical and cultural contexts that differ from the realities of contemporary society (Habibulloh, 2024; Ilham, 2020; Muzakkir & Muhammad, 2024). As a result, some contemporary ethical issues are not explicitly addressed in classical religious texts. This situation encourages religious communities and scholars to reinterpret ethical principles in order to respond to modern challenges while remaining consistent with foundational religious values. Such reinterpretations may produce diverse perspectives among religious adherents regarding how ethical teachings should be applied in present-day contexts (Maidugu & Sadeeq, 2024; Ibrahim et al., 2024).

Differences in theological foundations, philosophical traditions, and cultural backgrounds also influence how each religion approaches contemporary ethical questions. Religious traditions may vary in their perspectives on issues such as individual freedom, gender relations, interreligious tolerance, and environmental responsibility (Arbuckle & Konisky, 2015; Ashadi, 2019; Casanova, 2019; Ulfah et al., 2021). These differences reflect the diversity of ethical reasoning within religious traditions and highlight the importance of understanding ethical perspectives within their respective doctrinal and cultural frameworks.

At the same time, many scholars have noted that major religions share several ethical principles that may be considered broadly universal. Values such as respect for human dignity, justice, compassion, honesty, and social responsibility are widely emphasized across different religious traditions. These shared ethical orientations suggest that religions, despite their doctrinal differences, may contribute to common moral concerns related to human welfare and social harmony. Recognizing these shared values may provide an important basis for dialogue and cooperation among religious communities in addressing global challenges.

Despite the growing interest in religious ethics, existing studies often focus on ethical perspectives within a single religious tradition. Comparative studies that examine how different religious traditions address similar ethical issues remain relatively limited, particularly in the context of contemporary moral challenges. A comparative perspective may provide a more comprehensive understanding of both

the similarities and differences in ethical approaches among major religions, thereby contributing to broader discussions about the role of religion in modern moral discourse.

Therefore, this study aims to explore ethical issues in the teachings of major world religions through a comparative approach. By examining selected ethical themes including human rights, environmental responsibility, and bioethical concerns this research seeks to identify how different religious traditions interpret and respond to contemporary moral challenges. Through qualitative analysis of relevant religious texts and academic literature, this study hopes to contribute to ongoing discussions on religious ethics and to highlight the potential role of interreligious understanding in addressing shared humanitarian concerns in modern society.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research design using a content analysis approach to examine ethical issues within the teachings of major world religions (Allsop et al., 2022; Engkizar et al., 2025; Engkizar et al., 2019; Sitasari, 2022). The qualitative approach is considered appropriate because the study focuses on interpreting religious texts, ethical doctrines, and scholarly discussions related to contemporary moral challenges. Content analysis enables a systematic examination of textual materials in order to identify ethical principles and interpret their relevance to modern ethical debates. Through a literature-based approach, the research analyzes both primary and secondary sources related to religious ethics (Adel et al., 2016; Ghasemi, 2023; Parry et al., 2014; Singh et al., 2023).

The primary data sources consist of major religious texts and authoritative religious documents that contain ethical teachings and normative guidance. These include the Quran in Islam, the Bible in Christianity, the Vedas in Hinduism, the Tripitaka in Buddhism, and the Analects associated with Confucian thought. In addition, the study considers official documents and statements issued by religious institutions that address contemporary ethical concerns such as environmental ethics, biomedical ethics, and social ethics (Franchini et al., 2021). These primary sources provide the normative foundation for understanding how each religious tradition articulates ethical principles.

Secondary data are obtained from recent academic literature published between 2020 and 2024. These sources include scholarly books on religious ethics, peer-reviewed journal articles discussing bioethics, environmental ethics, and digital ethics, as well as studies that explore comparative perspectives on religious moral traditions. Additional references include works related to human rights discourse and contemporary moral philosophy. The selection of these sources is based on several criteria, including relevance to the research topic, recency of publication, and academic credibility of the publication outlet (Engkizar et al., 2023).

Data collection was conducted through systematic literature searches in several academic databases, including Google Scholar, JSTOR, Elsevier, DOAJ, and university academic repositories. The collected literature was then organized according to thematic categories such as bioethics, environmental ethics, social ethics, and technology-related ethical issues. A thematic note-taking technique was used to identify and record key ethical principles, doctrinal statements, and interpretive arguments within each religious tradition that relate to contemporary moral issues (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Clarke & Braun, 2018; Engkizar et al., 2024;

Herzog et al., 2019; Terry et al., 2017).
The data were analyzed using two complementary analytical strategies. First, content analysis was applied to examine ethical teachings within each religious tradition by identifying recurring concepts, moral principles, and normative arguments found in the texts and scholarly interpretations. This process involved careful reading and interpretation in order to understand how ethical teachings are connected to contemporary issues such as climate change, artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and gender-related debates (Pandey et al., 2022; Rheude et al., 2021). Second, a comparative analysis was conducted to identify both similarities and differences in ethical perspectives among the selected religious traditions. The analysis focused on shared ethical values such as respect for life, justice, compassion, and responsibility toward the natural environment while also highlighting distinctive ethical reasoning frameworks within each religion.

Through this analytical framework, the study seeks to provide a structured comparison of how major world religions interpret and respond to contemporary ethical challenges. Differences in methodological traditions such as the role of ecclesiastical doctrine in Christianity, the use of jurisprudence and *maqasid al-shari'ah* in Islamic ethics, the emphasis on compassion and the alleviation of suffering in Buddhist ethics, the contextual understanding of dharma in Hindu traditions, and the interpretive authority of rabbinic traditions in Judaism are considered as part of the comparative examination of ethical reasoning across religious traditions (Mohadi & Tarshany, 2023; Mustapha et al., 2025).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Contemporary Ethical Issues and Religious Responses
The analysis of religious texts and contemporary scholarly literature indicates that major world religions engage with a range of ethical challenges emerging in modern society. Several thematic areas frequently discussed in recent literature include bioethics, technological ethics, environmental responsibility, gender and minority rights, and issues of social justice (Akthar, 2024; Brady, 2017; Idris et al., 2023). Although the responses of different religious traditions vary according to theological frameworks and interpretive traditions, the findings suggest that many religions attempt to reconcile long-standing ethical principles with contemporary moral concerns.

Bioethics
Bioethical issues represent one of the most widely discussed areas in contemporary religious ethics. Questions related to medical technology, vaccination, reproductive health, organ transplantation, and end-of-life care have prompted religious scholars and institutions to reconsider ethical principles within the context of modern healthcare systems (Ibrahim et al., 2019; Saifuddeen et al., 2014).

Within Islamic ethical discourse, debates on bioethics are often framed through the concept of *maqasid al-shari'ah* (the objectives of Islamic law), which emphasizes the protection of fundamental human interests such as life, intellect, and well-being. Contemporary Muslim scholars frequently rely on fatwas and bioethical committees to address emerging medical technologies, including organ donation, assisted reproductive technologies, and vaccination programs. These discussions generally involve balancing considerations of *maslahah* (public benefit) and *mafsadah* (harm), reflecting attempts to integrate classical jurisprudential

principles with modern medical realities (Denton et al., 2022).

Christian traditions have also developed extensive bioethical frameworks. Many churches, including Catholic and Protestant denominations, have issued ethical guidelines addressing medical technologies, reproductive ethics, and end-of-life care. These discussions often emphasize the principle of the sanctity of life, alongside concerns about equitable access to healthcare services. However, responses are not uniform across Christian communities, as different denominations may adopt more conservative or more progressive positions on issues such as assisted reproduction and euthanasia.

In Buddhist ethical thought, moral reflection in healthcare settings frequently focuses on the alleviation of suffering (*dukkha*) and the practice of non-violence. Ethical discussions related to medical treatment, particularly end-of-life care, often emphasize compassion and the reduction of suffering for patients. At the same time, contemporary Buddhist scholarship has begun to explore how traditional ethical principles might address broader issues such as healthcare justice and collective well-being (Lehr, 2019).

Hindu and Jewish traditions similarly combine classical ethical teachings with contemporary interpretation when addressing bioethical questions. In Hindu ethical thought, principles such as *dharma* are often interpreted in ways that consider contextual moral responsibilities, including those related to reproductive technologies and medical interventions. Jewish bioethical discussions frequently rely on the interpretive tradition of *halakhah*, through which rabbinic authorities evaluate new technologies and medical practices within established legal frameworks.

In the case of vaccination and public health policies, contemporary studies suggest that many religious traditions attempt to balance individual autonomy with the collective welfare of communities. Religious authorities in several traditions have issued statements supporting vaccination programs as a means of protecting public health, although debates sometimes emerge regarding religious exemptions or individual conscience (Bajracharya, 2024; Wanarathana, 2023).

Ethics of Technology and Artificial Intelligence

Another emerging area in religious ethical discourse concerns technological development, particularly artificial intelligence (AI) and digital technologies. Issues such as algorithmic bias, data privacy, automation of labor, and the moral status of intelligent machines have raised questions about how religious ethical frameworks should address the growing influence of technology in human life.

Across different traditions, a recurring concern involves the protection of human dignity and justice in the development and application of technological systems. Religious ethical perspectives often emphasize the need for responsible governance of technology, including safeguards against exploitation, social inequality, and the misuse of digital data. Some contemporary theological discussions have therefore encouraged dialogue between religious scholars, technology developers, and policy makers in order to ensure that ethical values remain relevant in technological innovation (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Mehdaoui, 2024; Sani & Abdulmumini, 2025).

Environmental Ethics and Climate Responsibility

Environmental degradation and climate change have increasingly become subjects of ethical reflection within religious traditions. Although the theological language and doctrinal foundations differ across religions, many traditions appear

to possess ethical resources that support environmental responsibility.

In Islamic thought, the concept of *khalifah* (human stewardship of the Earth) often serves as a basis for environmental ethics. This perspective emphasizes the responsibility of humans to manage natural resources responsibly and to avoid wastefulness. Similarly, Christian environmental ethics frequently draws upon the doctrine of creation, which encourages stewardship and responsibility toward the natural world.

Buddhist ethical traditions often emphasize interdependence and non-violence toward all living beings, which can support ecological awareness and environmental care. Hindu and Jewish traditions also contain teachings that encourage respect for nature through ritual practices, moral obligations, and legal interpretations related to environmental protection.

Recent literature indicates that these ethical perspectives have contributed to the emergence of interreligious environmental initiatives and faith-based climate advocacy movements. In such contexts, religious teachings are often invoked to encourage moral responsibility toward future generations and the sustainability of the natural environment (Ibrahim et al., 2024; Kalkavan et al., 2021).

Gender, Sexuality, and Minority Rights

Among contemporary ethical debates, issues related to gender equality, sexuality, and minority rights remain among the most contested. Religious responses vary considerably across traditions and within internal communities.

Some Christian denominations and conservative Muslim groups maintain traditional interpretations concerning gender roles and sexual ethics, while other communities have developed more inclusive interpretations that emphasize equality and human dignity. Within Hindu and Buddhist traditions, responses often vary depending on cultural context and reform movements. Jewish communities also demonstrate diversity in interpretation, with Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform traditions adopting different approaches to issues such as gender participation and sexual ethics (Collins-Kreiner, 2007; Mujahid, 2021).

Social changes, including debates on same-sex marriage, reproductive rights, and access to gender-affirming healthcare, have encouraged religious communities to reconsider how ethical teachings should be interpreted. In this context, contemporary hermeneutical approaches play an important role, particularly in determining whether sacred texts are interpreted through historical-contextual perspectives or through more literal readings.

Social, Economic, and Political Justice

Beyond individual moral issues, religious ethical teachings also address broader concerns related to social justice, economic inequality, and political responsibility. Many religious traditions emphasize moral obligations toward marginalized groups, the equitable distribution of resources, and the promotion of social solidarity.

In the context of growing economic inequality, religious organizations and institutions often participate in charitable activities, social welfare programs, and advocacy efforts aimed at addressing structural injustice. Churches, Muslim charitable organizations, and other faith-based institutions frequently play roles in humanitarian assistance and community development initiatives (Danner et al., 2021; Palacio et al., 2021).

Comparative Patterns in Religious Ethical Responses

A comparative examination of these ethical discussions reveals several

recurring patterns across religious traditions. First, differences in religious authority structures appear to influence how ethical adaptations occur. Traditions with well-defined legal frameworks, such as Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and Jewish *halakhah*, often employ formal mechanisms such as legal interpretation, fatwas, or rabbinic rulings to address emerging issues. Other traditions, including many Christian and Buddhist communities, may rely more heavily on theological reflection, pastoral guidance, and scholarly discourse.

Second, some traditions employ teleological reasoning in ethical deliberation. Concepts such as *maqasid al-shari'ah* in Islam or *dharma* in Hindu thought provide frameworks that emphasize broader moral objectives, allowing scholars to evaluate new technologies and social developments according to their long-term ethical consequences.

Third, institutional involvement appears to influence the extent to which religious ethical perspectives affect public policy and social discourse. Religious councils, theological bodies, and interfaith organizations can play significant roles in shaping ethical responses to contemporary issues.

Finally, the literature frequently highlights the importance of interdisciplinary dialogue. Religious ethical reflection may become more effective when it engages with scientific research, technological expertise, and public policy discussions. Such interactions may help ensure that ethical considerations remain relevant within rapidly changing social and technological contexts.

Challenges and Opportunities

Despite the potential contributions of religious ethics to contemporary moral discourse, several challenges remain. One challenge involves interpretive diversity within religious traditions, which may lead to differing ethical positions and sometimes create uncertainty among adherents. Another challenge concerns the tension between historical religious texts and rapidly evolving social realities, raising questions about how classical teachings should be interpreted in modern contexts. In addition, the politicization of religion in certain contexts may complicate the role of religious ethics in public discourse (Az-Zahra et al., 2025; Kalsum et al., 2025; Kassymova et al., 2025).

At the same time, several opportunities can also be identified. Ethical frameworks such as *maqasid* in Islamic thought or *dharma* in Hindu philosophy may provide conceptual tools for evaluating technological developments and public policies. Interreligious cooperation on global issues, such as climate change and public health crises, also demonstrates the potential for collaborative ethical engagement across religious boundaries. Furthermore, the development of contemporary ethical education within religious institutions may help prepare religious leaders and communities to engage constructively with emerging moral challenges.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study suggest that the ethical teachings of major world religions continue to offer important moral resources for addressing contemporary challenges. Concepts such as human dignity, communal responsibility, and normative guidance remain central elements within many religious ethical traditions. While similarities can be observed in the emphasis on fundamental moral values, differences often emerge in the interpretative frameworks and institutional mechanisms through which ethical teachings are applied.

The comparative analysis also indicates that religious responses to contemporary ethical issues tend to be more adaptive when doctrinal traditions are interpreted in dialogue with scientific knowledge and broader public discourse. Such engagement does not necessarily diminish the moral foundations of religious traditions, but may contribute to their continued relevance in modern societies.

In this context, religious traditions may continue to function as meaningful contributors to contemporary ethical discussions. When approached constructively, interreligious dialogue and engagement with social and scientific perspectives may help strengthen ethical reflection and provide additional perspectives for addressing complex moral issues in a rapidly changing world.

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